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Noise Pollution

Each of us has the ability to reduce noise in our community by being aware of the noise we make. Many noise problems are prevented by being considerate of others and talking through problems when they occur.

Any loud noise that occurs between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. could be considered noise pollution unless your local area has different standards. The zoning of your location also determines if a noise is considered "pollution". For example, industrial zones may have louder noises than residential zones. Your local government has authority to regulate noise from most land uses. Local governments may enforce model regulations that have been adopted by the Department of Ecology (Ecology), but not noise regulations. Some noise sources – such as airports, trains and military bases – have special procedures related to noise. Ecology does not have authority to enforce noise rules or local noise ordinances.

To learn more about how to manage a noise pollution problem read our [Frequently Asked Questions for Citizens](#) and [Questions for Local Government](#). If you have a noise complaint or questions about noise enforcement, contact your local government.

Washington Laws and Rules

- [Chapter 70.107 RCW - Noise control](#)
- [Chapter 46.09 RCW - Off-road and highway vehicles](#)
- [Chapter 173-58 WAC - Sound level measurement procedures](#)
- [Chapter 173-60 WAC - Maximum environmental noise levels](#)
- [Chapter 173-62 WAC - Motor vehicle noise performance standards](#)

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Federal Government

- [Summary of the Noise Control Act](#)

WAC 173-60-040

*exemptions: aircraft
aircraft in flight*

More Noise Information

- [About Noise from Med-line Plus](#)
- [Federal Highway Traffic Noise Regulations and Guidance](#)
- [National Center for Environmental Health](#)
- [Noise Pollution Clearinghouse](#)
- [Occupation Safety & Health Administration](#)
- [The Right for Quiet Society](#)

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Chapter 173-60 WAC
MAXIMUM ENVIRONMENTAL NOISE LEVELS

Last Update: 12/6/00

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WAC 173-60-010 Authority and purpose. These rules are adopted pursuant to chapter 70.107 RCW, the Noise Control Act of 1974, in order to establish maximum noise levels permissible in identified environments, and thereby to provide use standards relating to the reception of noise within such environments. Vessels, as defined in RCW 88.12.010(21) and regulated for noise under chapter 88.12 RCW (Regulation of recreational vessels), shall be exempt from chapter 173-60 WAC.

[Statutory Authority: Chapter 70.107 RCW. 94-12-001 (Order 92-41), § 173-60-010, filed 5/18/94, effective 6/18/94; Order 74-32, § 173-60-010, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-020 Definitions. (1) "Background sound level" means the level of all sounds in a given environment, independent of the specific source being measured.

(2) "dBA" means the sound pressure level in decibels measured using the "A" weighting network on a sound level meter. The sound pressure level, in decibels, of a sound is 20 times the logarithm to the base 10 of the ratio of the pressure of the sound to a reference pressure of 20 micropascals.

(3) "Department" means the department of ecology.

(4) "Director" means the director of the department of ecology.

(5) "Distribution facilities" means any facility used for distribution of commodities to final consumers, including facilities of utilities that convey water, waste water, natural gas, and electricity.

(6) "EDNA" means the environmental designation for noise abatement, being an area or zone (environment) within which maximum permissible noise levels are established.

(7) "Existing" means a process, event, or activity in an established area, producing sound subject to or exempt from this chapter, prior to the effective date of September 1, 1975.

(8) "Local government" means county or city government or any combination of the two.

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(9) "Noise" means the intensity, duration and character of sounds, from any and all sources.

(10) "Person" means any individual, corporation, partnership, association, governmental body, state agency or other entity whatsoever.

(11) "Property boundary" means the surveyed line at ground surface, which separates the real property owned, rented, or leased by one or more persons, from that owned, rented, or leased by one or more other persons, and its vertical extension.

(12) "Racing event" means any motor vehicle competition conducted under a permit issued by a governmental authority having jurisdiction or, if such permit is not required, then under the auspices of a recognized sanctioning body.

(13) "Receiving property" means real property within which the maximum permissible noise levels specified herein shall not be exceeded from sources outside such property.

(14) "Sound level meter" means a device which measures sound pressure levels and conforms to Type 1 or Type 2 as specified in the American National Standards Institute Specification S1.4-1971.

[Statutory Authority: Chapter 70.107 RCW. 94-12-001 (Order 92-41), § 173-60-020, filed 5/18/94, effective 6/18/94; 83-15-046 (Order DE 82-42), § 173-60-020, filed 7/19/83; Order DE 77-1, § 173-60-020, filed 6/1/77; Order 74-32, § 173-60-020, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-030 Identification of environments. (1) Except when included within specific prior designations as provided in subsections (2), (3), and (4) of this section, the EDNA of any property shall be based on the following typical uses, taking into consideration the present, future, and historical usage, as well as the usage of adjacent and other lands in the vicinity.

(a) **Class A EDNA - Lands where human beings reside and sleep.** Typically, Class A EDNA will be the following types of property used for human habitation:

(i) **Residential**

(ii) **Multiple family living accommodations**

(iii) **Recreational and entertainment**, (e.g., camps, parks, camping facilities, and resorts)

(iv) **Community service**, (e.g., orphanages, homes for the aged, hospitals, health and correctional facilities)

(b) **Class B EDNA - Lands involving uses requiring protection against noise interference with speech.** Typically, Class B EDNA will be the following types of property:

(i) **Commercial living accommodations**

(ii) **Commercial dining establishments**

(iii) **Motor vehicle services**

(iv) **Retail services**

(v) **Banks and office buildings**

(vi) **Miscellaneous commercial services**, property not used for human habitation

(vii) **Recreation and entertainment**, property not used for human habitation (e.g., theaters, stadiums, fairgrounds, and amusement parks)

(viii) **Community services**, property not used for human habitation (e.g., educational, religious, governmental, cultural and recreational facilities).

(c) Class C EDNA - Lands involving economic activities of such a nature that higher noise levels than experienced in other areas is normally to be anticipated. Persons working in these areas are normally covered by noise control regulations of the department of labor and industries. Uses typical of Class A EDNA are generally not permitted within such areas.

Typically, Class C EDNA will be the following types of property:

- (i) Storage, warehouse, and distribution facilities.
- (ii) Industrial property used for the production and fabrication of durable and nondurable man-made goods
- (iii) Agricultural and silvicultural property used for the production of crops, wood products, or livestock.

(d) Where there is neither a zoning ordinance in effect nor an adopted comprehensive plan, the legislative authority of local government may, by ordinance or resolution, designate specifically described EDNAs which conform to the above use criteria and, upon departmental approval, EDNAs so designated shall be as set forth in such local determination.

(e) Where no specific prior designation of EDNAs has been made, the appropriate EDNA for properties involved in any enforcement activity will be determined by the investigating official on the basis of the criteria of (a), (b), and (c) of this subsection.

(2) In areas covered by a local zoning ordinance, the legislative authority of the local government may, by ordinance or resolution designate EDNAs to conform with the zoning ordinance as follows:

- (a) Residential zones - Class A EDNA
- (b) Commercial zones - Class B EDNA
- (c) Industrial zones - Class C EDNA

Upon approval by the department, EDNAs so designated shall be as set forth in such local determination. EDNA designations shall be amended as necessary to conform to zone changes under the zoning ordinance.

(3) In areas not covered by a local zoning ordinance but within the coverage of an adopted comprehensive plan the legislative authority of the local government may, by ordinance or resolution designate EDNAs to conform with the comprehensive plan as follows:

- (a) Residential areas - Class A EDNA
- (b) Commercial areas - Class B EDNA
- (c) Industrial areas - Class C EDNA

Upon approval by the department EDNAs so designated shall be as set forth in such local determination. EDNA designations shall be amended as necessary to conform to changes in the comprehensive plan.

(4) The department recognizes that on certain lands, serenity, tranquillity, or quiet are an essential part of the quality of the environment and serve an important public need. Special designation of such lands with appropriate noise level standards by local government may be adopted subject to approval by the department. The director may make such special designation pursuant to the procedures of the Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 34.04 RCW.

[Order 74-32, § 173-60-030, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-040 Maximum permissible environmental noise levels. (1) No person shall cause or permit noise to intrude into the property of another person which noise exceeds the maximum permissible noise levels set forth below in this section.

(2)(a) The noise limitations established are as set forth in the following table after any applicable adjustments provided for herein are applied.

	EDNA OF NOISE SOURCE	EDNA OF RECEIVING PROPERTY		
		Class A	Class B	Class C
CLASS A	55 dBA	57 dBA	60 dBA	
CLASS B	57	60	65	
CLASS C	60	65	70	

(b) Between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. the noise limitations of the foregoing table shall be reduced by 10 dBA for receiving property within Class A EDNAs.

(c) At any hour of the day or night the applicable noise limitations in (a) and (b) above may be exceeded for any receiving property by no more than:

- (i) 5 dBA for a total of 15 minutes in any one-hour period; or
- (ii) 10 dBA for a total of 5 minutes in any one-hour period; or
- (iii) 15 dBA for a total of 1.5 minutes in any one-hour period.

[Order 74-32, § 173-60-040, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-050 Exemptions. (1) The following shall be exempt from the provisions of WAC 173-60-040 between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.:

(a) Sounds originating from residential property relating to temporary projects for the maintenance or repair of homes, grounds and appurtenances.

(b) Sounds created by the discharge of firearms on authorized shooting ranges.

(c) Sounds created by blasting.

(d) Sounds created by aircraft engine testing and maintenance not related to flight operations: Provided, That aircraft testing and maintenance shall be conducted at remote sites whenever possible.

(e) Sounds created by the installation or repair of essential utility services.

(2) The following shall be exempt from the provisions of WAC 173-60-040 (2)(b):

(a) Noise from electrical substations and existing stationary equipment used in the conveyance of water, waste water, and natural gas by a utility.

(b) Noise from existing industrial installations which exceed the standards contained in these regulations and which, over the previous three years, have consistently operated in excess of 15 hours per day as a consequence of process necessity and/or demonstrated routine normal operation. Changes in working hours, which would affect exemptions under this regulation, require approval of the department.

(3) The following shall be exempt from the provisions of WAC 173-60-040, except insofar as such provisions relate to the reception of noise within Class A EDNAs between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.

residential areas - not exempt! 10pm - 7am

(a) Sounds originating from temporary construction sites as a result of construction activity.

(b) Sounds originating from forest harvesting and silvicultural activity.

(4) The following shall be exempt from all provisions of WAC 173-60-040:

(a) Sounds created by motor vehicles when regulated by chapter 173-62 WAC.

(b) Sounds originating from aircraft in flight and sounds that originate at airports which are directly related to flight operations.

(c) Sounds created by surface carriers engaged in interstate commerce by railroad.

(d) Sounds created by warning devices not operating continuously for more than five minutes, or bells, chimes, and carillons.

(e) Sounds created by safety and protective devices where noise suppression would defeat the intent of the device or is not economically feasible.

(f) Sounds created by emergency equipment and work necessary in the interests of law enforcement or for health safety or welfare of the community.

(g) Sounds originating from motor vehicle racing events at existing authorized facilities.

(h) Sounds originating from officially sanctioned parades and other public events.

(i) Sounds emitted from petroleum refinery boilers during startup of said boilers:

Provided, That the startup operation is performed during daytime hours whenever possible.

(j) Sounds created by the discharge of firearms in the course of hunting.

(k) Sounds caused by natural phenomena and unamplified human voices.

(l) Sounds created by motor vehicles, licensed or unlicensed, when operated off public highways EXCEPT when such sounds are received in Class A EDNAs.

(m) Sounds originating from existing natural gas transmission and distribution facilities. However, in circumstances where such sounds impact EDNA Class A environments and complaints are received, the director or his designee may take action to abate by application of EDNA Class C source limits to the facility under the requirements of WAC 173-60-050(5).

(6) Nothing in these exemptions is intended to preclude the department from requiring installation of the best available noise abatement technology consistent with economic feasibility. The establishment of any such requirement shall be subject to the provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act, chapter 34.04 RCW.

[Statutory Authority: Chapter 70.107 RCW. 94-12-001 (Order 92-41), § 173-60-050, filed 5/18/94, effective 6/18/94; 83-15-046 (Order DE 82-42), § 173-60-050, filed 7/19/83; Order DE 77-1, § 173-60-050, filed 6/2/77; Order 75-18, § 173-60-050, filed 8/1/75; Order 74-32, § 173-60-050, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-060 Nuisance regulations not prohibited. Nothing in this chapter or the exemptions provided herein, shall be construed as preventing local government from regulating noise from any source as a nuisance. Local resolutions, ordinances, rules or regulations regulating noise on such a basis shall not be deemed inconsistent with this chapter by the department.

[Order 74-32, § 173-60-060, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-070 Reserved. Reserved.

[Statutory Authority: Chapter 70.107 RCW. 00-24-134 (Order 00-24), § 173-60-070, filed 12/6/00, effective 1/6/01; 94-12-001 (Order 92-41), § 173-60-070, filed 5/18/94, effective 6/18/94; Order DE 77-1, § 173-60-070, filed 6/1/77; Order 74-32, § 173-60-070, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-080 Variances and implementation schedules. (1) Variances may be granted to any person from any particular requirement of this chapter, if findings are made that immediate compliance with such requirement cannot be achieved because of special circumstances rendering immediate compliance unreasonable in light of economic or physical factors, encroachment [encroachment] upon an existing noise source, or because of nonavailability of feasible technology or control methods. Any such variance or renewal thereof shall be granted only for the minimum time period found to be necessary under the facts and circumstances.

(2) An implementation schedule for achieving compliance with this chapter shall be incorporated into any variance issued.

(3) Variances shall be issued only upon application in writing and after providing such information as may be requested. No variance shall be issued for a period of more than 30 days except upon due notice to the public with opportunity to comment. Public hearings may be held, when substantial public interest is shown, at the discretion of the issuing agency.

(4) Sources of noise, subject to this chapter, upon which construction begins after the effective date hereof shall immediately comply with the requirements of this chapter, except in extraordinary circumstances where overriding considerations of public interest dictate the issuance of a variance.

[Order 74-32, § 173-60-080, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-090 Enforcement policy. Noise measurement for the purposes of enforcing the provisions of WAC 173-60-040 shall be measured in dBA with a sound level meter with the point of measurement being at any point within the receiving property. Such enforcement shall be undertaken only upon receipt of a complaint made by a person who resides, owns property, or is employed in the area affected by the noise complained of, EXCEPT for parks, recreational areas, and wildlife sanctuaries. For enforcement purposes pursuant to RCW

70.107.050, each day, defined as the 24-hour period beginning at 12:01 a.m., in which violation of the noise control regulations (chapter 173-60 WAC) occurs, shall constitute a separate violation.

[Order DE 76-5, § 173-60-090, filed 2/5/76; Order 74-32, § 173-60-090, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-100 Appeals. Any person aggrieved by any decision of the department in relation to the enforcement of the maximum permissible noise levels provided for herein, the granting or denial of a variance or the approval or disapproval of a local resolution or ordinance for noise abatement and control may appeal to the pollution control hearings board pursuant to chapter 43.21B RCW under the procedures of chapter 371-08 WAC.

[Order 74-32, § 173-60-100, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-110 Cooperation with local government. (1) The department conceives the function of noise abatement and control to be primarily the role of local government and intends actively to encourage local government to adopt measures for noise abatement and control. Wherever such measures are made effective and are being actively enforced, the department does not intend to engage directly in enforcement activities.

(2) No ordinance or resolution of any local government which imposes noise control requirements differing from those adopted by the department shall be effective unless and until approved by the director. If approval is denied, the department, following submission of such local ordinance or resolution to the department, shall deliver its statement or order of denial, designating in detail the specific provision(s) found to be objectionable and the precise grounds upon which the denial is based, and shall submit to the local government, the department's suggested modification.

(3) The department shall encourage all local governments enforcing noise ordinances pursuant to this chapter to consider noise criteria and land use planning and zoning.

[Statutory Authority: Chapter 70.107 RCW. 87-06-056 (Order 86-40), § 173-60-110, filed 3/4/87; Order 74-32, § 173-60-110, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]

WAC 173-60-120 Effective date. This chapter shall become effective on September 1, 1975. It is the intention of the department to periodically review the provisions hereof as new information becomes available for the purpose of making amendments as appropriate.

[Order 74-32, § 173-60-120, filed 4/22/75, effective 9/1/75.]



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Noise Pollution

Frequently Asked Questions for Local Government

This page provides answers to the most frequently asked questions the Department of Ecology (Ecology) receives from local government about noise pollution and was prepared in conjunction with the Office of Regulatory Assistance.

Q: What is the role of local government in regulating noise?

A: There are three roles that local government may have in regulating noise:

1. Adopt a local noise ordinance to set noise standards for their area.
2. Enforce the local noise ordinance.
3. If no local noise ordinance exists, enforce Ecology's rules.

Q: Can a local government adopt a local noise ordinance?

A: Yes. Local governments can do any of the following:

1. Use Ecology's rules;
2. Adopt a local noise ordinance that includes:
 - All of Ecology's rules;
 - Sections of Ecology's rules;
 - Sections of Ecology's rules along with standards written by the local government; or
 - Standards that are different from those in Ecology's rules, if submitted to Ecology and not disapproved.

Q: What if the local noise ordinance is different from Ecology's rules?

A: When the local noise ordinance is different, the standards and limits in the local noise ordinance will apply. If something is not covered by the local ordinance, then Ecology's rules ([Chapter 173-58, 173-60, 173-62 WAC](#)) will apply. Any ordinance differing from Ecology's rules must be submitted to Ecology for approval

Q: Do local noise ordinances need to be submitted to Ecology?

A: The only time a local noise ordinance needs to be submitted to Ecology is when it is different from Ecology's rules. However, Ecology will appreciate receiving copies of all local noise ordinances.

Q: Where do local governments submit their noise ordinances?

A: Department of Ecology
Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600